

# Youth Leadership and Family Engagement



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## Background on Partnerships in Employment Systems Change Projects

In October 2011, the Administration on Developmental Disabilities awarded grants to lead agencies in six states: California, Iowa, Mississippi, Missouri, New York, and Wisconsin. Two additional states, Alaska and Tennessee, received grants in October 2012. These states proposed activities to spur improved employment and post-secondary outcomes for youth with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). The Institute for Community Inclusion and the National Association of State Directors of Developmental Disabilities Services are providing training and technical assistance (TA) to the eight state projects through the Partnerships in Employment (PIE) Training and TA Center.

Partnerships project work is framed by the High Performing States Transition Model which contains 8 key elements: collaboration, leadership, state goals and policy, funding and contracting, staff training, service innovation, performance management and quality assurance, and youth leadership development and family engagement. This document is one in a series of PIE Project Fact Sheets that have been developed to chronicle how PIE grantee states are making change under the elements of the High Performing States Transition model.

***The High Performing States Transition Model recognizes that systems change activities must include youth and young adults with IDD and their families. Successful systems change activities work to build power and community with these stakeholders. Supports are built into activities so that youth with IDD and families are able to fully participate with other stakeholders in the systems change process.***

## MISSOURI

Missouri's Show Me Careers (SMC) collaborative brought family support and engagement into its PIE project as a key part of its strategy for systems change. The SMC leadership consortium chose family involvement as one of six core research-to-practice principles to guide its work in identifying statewide systems barriers and developing pilot transition systems within eight communities.

The request for proposal for selecting pilot transition communities gave applicants a framework for examining provision of supports to families in their area. It encouraged applicants to put in place or expand practices shown to be effective in supporting

families' expectations for integrated employment and facilitating their participation in all aspects of transition planning.

The leadership consortium then engaged each of the selected pilot communities in further analyses of services to families. The information gathered through this process, supplemented by state-level surveys, led the consortium to conclude that insufficient support of family engagement was a statewide systems-level barrier to the integrated employment of youth and young adults with IDD.

Analysis revealed families' need for policies and practices that encourage them to see integrated community employment as a desired and feasible outcome, provide knowledge of services and opportunities and how to access them, and address questions about the impact of employment on young people's benefits and financial viability.

The consortium has prioritized engaging families early and providing access to information and support. It is taking several steps to build this capacity, both with its pilot communities and statewide. Specifically, it is collaborating with Missouri's Family-to-Family Resource Center and the National Supporting Families Community of Practice to develop system-wide supports for families across the lifespan and to design a family support transition toolkit.

SMC is also piloting a community planning and technical assistance initiative based upon the Charting the Life Course framework. This initiative will support teams in communities to develop and implement specific plans to enhance family support policies and practices. The consortium also worked with the Missouri Developmental Disabilities Council to provide training related to benefits and asset building for members of the pilot communities, as well as others around the state.

## Lessons learned:

- » Missouri's research-to-practice approach demonstrates how states can use empirical research and their own analyses of community and state systems to identify barriers to employment and develop meaningful steps toward systems change.

- » Missouri's consortium used previous research to identify family engagement as a key component of systems leading to the integrated employment of youth and young adults with IDD. Using this research as a framework, the consortium engaged pilots in community-level analyses of supports that, combined with state-level surveys, data, and a needs assessment, revealed key gaps in services in this area.
- » Communities struggle to implement effective strategies that engage families in preparing their individuals with IDD for integrated employment. An ongoing area of learning is how diverse partners within communities (e.g., schools, providers, state agency personnel) can collaborate to put in place effective policies and practices supporting family engagement.

## MISSISSIPPI

The Mississippi Partnerships for Employment of Youth and Young Adults with DD/ID (MSPE) has, from its inception, included youth and young adults with IDD as key participants in its systems change efforts. Young self-advocates with IDD helped develop Mississippi's application for PIE project funding.

In Mississippi, youth and young adults with IDD are helping to advance integrated employment. They create an awareness of their desire for competitive work, the barriers they face, and the kinds of systems changes that are needed to achieve integrated employment outcomes. Their participation resulted in a new state-level policy, Executive Order 1335, and three model demonstration programs that will help to increase integrated employment outcomes in their state.

Two self-advocates signed on to the inter-organizational memorandum of understanding as originating partners of MSPE, along with top executive officers of Mississippi's Departments of Education, Rehabilitation Services, Mental Health, and Employment Security. Each of these partners, including the self-advocates, has an equally weighted vote in consortium decision-making, attends meetings on the PIE project, serves on committees to identify and address systemic barriers to employment, recruits members of the stakeholder group, and participates in developing MSPE operational rules.

The consortium is charged with identifying innovative strategies and best practices for systems improvement, as well as providing training. It includes

self-advocates, family members, representatives from Mississippi's Parent Training and Information Center and Client Assistance Program, employers, and service providers. At each consortium meeting, youth and young adults with IDD have an opportunity to share their stories of wanting work, facing barriers, and experiencing success in employment. MSPE also features these stories on the consortium's website, [www.mspeidd.org](http://www.mspeidd.org).

Mississippi's Institute for Disability Studies, a managing partner of MSPE and coordinator of the stakeholder group, contracts with self-advocates. The Institute also collaborates with the Mississippi Self-Advocacy Team to provide training and technical assistance to other youth and young adults, families, educators, service providers, and employers.

Mississippi's Council on Developmental Disabilities involved self-advocates in designing a demonstration program model to restructure a sheltered work environment to move employees with IDD into competitive community employment. Self-advocates also participated in MSPE advocacy for Employment First legislation and the public signing of the executive order that resulted from this effort.

### Lessons learned:

- » Youth and young adults with IDD should be included in collaborative systems change efforts to achieve integrated employment.
- » Their experience and participation give purpose and direction to these efforts.



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